

We need a government that works

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From The Hill

A year ago, the American people turned to a new president and the promise of hope, much as flowers turn to the sun.

But hope is only truly meaningful when it is rooted in reality. It is time for a reality check.

As the President prepares to deliver his State of the Union Address, we need not just optimism, but a basis for that optimism and a belief that it will translate into action.

Travel around this wonderful country, as I have been fortunate to do, and Americans speak with one voice about our hopes and fears.

We want jobs - meaningful work - that will allow us to provide for our family.

We want a home - safe and secure - that will allow us to raise our family.

We want our children to have a better life than we had.

We want a future that doesn't saddle us with debt.

And Americans want a government that works. We don't want government to abandon us. We don't want government to do everything for us. We want government to work, and give us a fair chance to do for ourselves.

In the past year, the underpinnings of our nation have crumbled and fallen away and it is as though we're standing on a glass floor with a million cracks in it and nothing beneath.

The President has done well to prevent a complete economic catastrophe and I believe this Congress has acted with unprecedented speed and breadth to enact legislation that will bring back economic growth and promote innovative new industries.

But we cannot forget the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he described "the fierce urgency of now."

I'm privileged to represent the restlessly creative Silicon Valley, and the phone calls coming into my office are from people who say, "I'm down to my last few dollars. I need help now."

So, I look to the President to deliver the word that we hear that message, that we heed it and that we are prepared to act -- both the White House and Congress - to provide immediate aid and comfort.

There are some things we can do right now.

Extend bankruptcy relief to homeowners facing foreclosure. Allow them to restructure their debts, remain in their homes and give them a fighting chance to work their way out of their financial ditch.

Get the banks to loan to small businesses, which are the backbone of our national economy.

All over the country, school districts, community colleges, cities, counties and public agencies, such as transit districts, have lost millions of dollars due to the collapse of such once-bedrock institutions as Lehman Brothers.

These were sound, conservative investments of public funds, not risky flights of profit-hungry fancy and these are troubled assets just as surely as any bank's.

Extend the TARP funds to these public entities. A million dollars is small change in Washington, but to a school district or a county government, it is the difference between layoffs or saving some jobs and creating others.

When Franklin Roosevelt took office in the depths of the Depression and announced his 100-day plan for turning the nation around, he was asked what he would do if his plan didn't work. He famously replied, "Then we'll try something else."

Why not borrow an idea from FDR? Put federal dollars directly into the pockets of American workers and rebuild our county and state parks and repair our infrastructure.

Make the commitment to today and I can guarantee you that in California and Silicon Valley we are committed to tomorrow's growth.

California is poised to lead the nation in the design and construction of the first American high-speed rail network. High-speed rail will revolutionize this country the way the National Highway System did in the 1950s and 1960s.

Federal dollars to this project will mean an entirely new American industry, American-made products and new jobs that will build everything from the wheels and the rails down to the tiniest bolt. And it will draw the best of our young minds to a transformative industry.

Through the stimulus package and the American Clean Energy and Security Act, billions of dollars in federal money will create a million new startups in science, technology and the next, new, previously unimagined thing.

In my home district, this is our everyday life and dozens of burgeoning companies at the cutting edge of green and clean technology are poised for an explosion in innovation and healthy, sustainable economic growth.

There is reason for hope. The foundation has been laid for the next American Renaissance in innovation and invention. This is our innate optimism - uniquely American and distinctively on display in Silicon Valley.

The President captured that spirit a year ago. He is gifted in his ability to imbue all of us with that spirit and he has proven, through his unprecedented campaign skills at grass-roots communication, that he understands the networks that interlace our lives.

He must put those talents to use again. He can and must do it with the promise not just of a better tomorrow, but a better today.